

## 9.20.2007 - Celebrating Black Colleges and Universities Week

Every

September we celebrate Black Colleges and Universities Week, a week dedicated to the achievements of institutions such as Bluefield State College, and the role that African Americans have played in America's history of higher education.

Bluefield

State College was established as a black teachers college by an act of the West Virginia Legislature in 1895 and was integrated in 1954. Bluefield State is known throughout southern West Virginia for its long and storied tradition of excellence in education and reputation of success. With each graduating class, Bluefield State College continues to make southern West Virginia proud.

Today,

Bluefield State College is preparing students for promising careers, graduate study, community involvement, and public service to help face the challenges of our ever-changing global society.

In

Congress, we have been working to prepare the American people for those same challenges-by defending our country, growing our economy, strengthening our families, restoring accountability, and preserving our environment.

To revitalize

the American Dream and grow our economy, we have created an "Innovation Agenda," investing in American ingenuity to bolster our ability to compete in a global economy, with provisions for increasing the number of women and minorities entering the science, technology, engineering, and math fields.

This

September, as the cost of college education continues to rise across the country, Congress passed historic college aid legislation that will make college more affordable for African American students and help support Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

H.R. 2669, The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007, is the single largest investment in college financial assistance since the 1944 GI Bill. It will increase the maximum Pell Grant scholarship - the federal scholarship for low and moderate income students that about 47 percent of all African American students receive - by \$490 over the

next year and at least \$1,090 over the next five years

H.R. 2669 will also cut interest rates on need-based federal student loans in half, from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent, over five years. About 38 percent of African American students take out need-based student loans each year. Once fully implemented, this cut will save the typical borrower - with about \$13,800 in need-based loan debt - \$4,400 over the life of the loan.

H.R. 2669 also contains several provisions specifically designed to benefit Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The legislation will provide \$170 million in grants for HBCUs over the next five years. HBCUs enroll 14 percent of all African American students. All 99 HBCUs that currently receive federal support stand to benefit from this significant funding increase.

H.R. 2669 will also create a new designation of Predominantly Black Institutions, for schools that enroll students with financial need and have at least 40 percent African American student enrollment. These schools will be eligible to receive \$30 million in grant aid over five years for programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering, health education, and teacher education as well as programs geared toward improving the educational outcomes of African American males.

I am proud of the exemplary work performed by Bluefield State College and all Historically Black Colleges and Universities in our country. These institutions are crucial to America's success in the global economy. And they play a vital role in cultivating many young African American men and women across our nation and right here in Southern West Virginia.

It is essential that we continue to support these schools that have made such an enormous contribution to America. It is my hope that these improvements to our nation's higher education system will see to it that Historically Black Colleges and Universities continue to be an instrumental part of our nation for years to come.